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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 ASTANA 002095

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [CH](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTANI UIGHUR GROUPS REFUSE TO SING AND DANCE IN  
CHINA, IN RESPONSE TO C-REF-01741

REFTELS: A. ASTANA 01210

[1](#)B. ASTANA 01292

[1](#)C. ASTANA 02066

[1](#)D. STATE 88234

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Pamela L. Spratlen, 1.4 (b),  
(d)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Following unrest in July and August in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), Kazakhstan's ethnic Uighurs -- one of the largest and fastest growing ethnic groups in Kazakhstan and an important political force -- criticized the Chinese government and staged a large protest in Almaty (ref A). Kazakhstani interest groups expressed concern that the situation could complicate relations between Kazakhstan and China. Government officials largely declined to comment on the political aspects of the unrest. During PolOff's subsequent visits to Almaty, where 90% of Kazakhstan's Uighur population lives, Uighur activists reiterated their concerns about China's treatment of the Uighurs, while acknowledging they try to avoid "creating trouble" between Kazakhstan and China. Kazakhstani Uighurs expressed concern for refugees fleeing "political persecution by the Chinese government" and appealed to the United States to urge China to alter its policies in the XUAR. END SUMMARY.

UIGHURS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN KAZAKHSTANI SOCIETY

[1](#)2. (SBU) PolOff met with the Deputy Chairman of the Uighurs' Republican Cultural Center, Turgan Rozakhunov, and the Chairwoman of Kazakhstan's "National Association of Uighurs," Tamara Mametova, to discuss their views on the situation in the XUAR in September. (COMMENT: The Center, established in 2003, has offices in 11 regions, with its largest offices in Almaty, Shymkent, and Zhambyl, where most of Kazakhstan's estimated 300,000 Uighurs live. Its administrative board's 39 members advocate for the interests of Kazakhstan's Uighurs. They are typically well-connected to President Nazarbayev and other political elites, and they advocate moderate, non-separatist views on Uighur political activities. END COMMENT.) Rozakhunov praised Anvar Khadzhiyev, with whom PolOff met shortly before his July death, and echoed his views about the excellent position of Uighurs in Kazakhstani society, especially since Uighurs receive education in their native language and have good relations

with other ethnic groups (ref A). According to Rozakhunov, Uighurs are the fifth largest ethnic group in Kazakhstan, and the third largest in Almaty city. He also asserted that many of Kazakhstan's prominent scientists, businesspeople, and political figures -- including 16 deputies in Parliament and Prime Minister Karim Masimov -- are Uighurs.

#### UIGHURS AND AUTHORITIES HAVE "MOSTLY POSITIVE" RELATIONSHIP

13. (SBU) The Uighurs' Republican Cultural Center, Rozakhunov said, was not designed to engage in political activities. Nonetheless, according to the Rozakhunov, "when approached by political parties and asked to support President Nursultan Nazarbayev, 99% of Uighurs voted for the President." Despite a generally positive relationship with Kazakhstani authorities, Rozakhunov alleged that the Center's charitable actions twice provoked minor complaints of interference from government authorities. In the first case, the Center funded construction of a school in the Yenbekshi region so that children could attend classes without moving to another village. Uighur donors also bought a "community facility" and turned it over to the local akimat (mayor's administration). Rozakhunov said the Vice Minister of Education raised this case and questioned the Center's involvement, pointing out that the Ministry is responsible for all matters related to education. In the second case, the Uighurs' Republican Cultural Center worked with the local akimat in a very remote region to construct a system of piped water to prevent sewage from entering the potable water supply after 40 children there were diagnosed with hepatitis. In both cases, Rozakhunov said the Ministries of Education and Health expressed appreciation for the Center's activities after they observed the projects' results. Rozakhunov told PolOff his center had raised one million dollars for

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various additional social projects, and is funding the higher education of 45 Uighur youths. "We want to participate in the activities of the authorities, not create a separate state within a state," the Center's Deputy Chairman explained. Rozakhunov dismissed the role of the Kazakhstan Peoples' Assembly, as a consultative body, in its ability to deal with inter-ethnic tensions, and called for establishment of a governmental body to solve such issues. (NOTE: President Nazarbayev created the Kazakhstan Peoples' Assembly (KPA) to serve as a consultative organization to make policy recommendations on strengthening social stability, and inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony. Nazarbayev is the Chairman for life. It has approximately 350 members selected by regional people's assemblies, and meets at least once a year. END NOTE.)

#### KAZAKHSTAN'S UIGHURS EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT SITUATION IN CHINA...

14. (SBU) Kazakhstan's Uighur population remains concerned about the treatment of ethnic Uighurs in China, particularly in Xinjiang province. Rozakhunov estimated that 60% of Kazakhstani Uighurs emigrated from China in 1952-1962. Therefore, most Uighurs have relatives in China and maintain social, linguistic, and cultural ties. Rozakhunov asserted that "large scale unrests have occurred every three to four years since the Uighurs' lands of Eastern Turkestan were expropriated and renamed Xinjiang. Uighur demonstrations are not the demonstrations of criminals," argued Rozakhunov, but rather "a struggle for freedom and human rights." Rozakhunov alleged the Chinese government broadcast incorrect information about the July events in the XUAR. Rozakhunov said that Kazakhstani Uighurs helped "to correct the mis-information and raise awareness about the situation in the XUAR by holding a government-sanctioned mourning ceremony on July 10."

#### ...AND WARN OF COMPLICATIONS FOR KAZAKHSTAN-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

15. (SBU) Kazakhstani Uighurs are aware of China's growing importance to Kazakhstan as an investor, strategic, and trade partner, and fellow member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). They also know that Uighur activism can complicate Kazakhstan's relations with China. According to Rozakhunov, the government allowed the Uighur community to demonstrate in July, "but consent was not granted easily." Rozakhunov said the country's Uighur organizations "should not put Kazakhstan into a difficult situation." Nevertheless, Rozakhunov explained that the Board of Directors unanimously voted

against the Chinese government's proposal for the Center to participate in the celebration of the 60th anniversary of China's independence. Rozakhunov and Mametova asserted that the Uighurs' Republican Cultural Center and the National Association of Uighurs will not sing and dance in China after the July events. "The Chinese Ambassador to Kazakhstan appealed to us in person, and the Chinese government offered us a lot of money, but still we cannot accept," Rozakhunov told PolOff.

#### REFUGEES FACE DIFFICULT CONDITIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN

¶6. (SBU) Tamara Mametova, Chairwoman of Kazakhstan's "National Association of Uighurs," expressed concern about the plight of Uighur refugees (Ref B). (COMMENT: Mametova has been a long-term, reliable Embassy contact, and her organization has resettled more than 10 families of XUAR refugees in Europe and the United States since 1997. END COMMENT.) According to Mametova, refugees lead very difficult lives in Kazakhstan. Police often detain them for short periods of time, even if they have documents to confirm their official status. Despite help from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Almaty, many are frightened and have difficulty to hold steady jobs and send their children to school. The lengthy resettlement process, which can take years, compounds the refugees' situation. Mametova lamented that U.S. processing times have increased tremendously since 2001. She said one refugee, after waiting many years, recently asked her organization to retrieve his documents to try another country, such as Holland, Norway, or Canada.

¶7. (SBU) Mametova also raised the specific case of Tair Medzhit and

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his three children, who have been waiting in Kazakhstan for refugee status for two years. Mametova claims that his father is a political figure in the XUAR, and Chinese authorities arrested and killed his brother. According to Mametova, Medzhit tried to escape to Kazakhstan, but was instead smuggled into Pakistan, and eventually Afghanistan. Mametova claims he escaped, along with several other Uzbek Uighurs, and asked why his case has dragged on so long "when the cases of other young people imprisoned in Guantanamo have already resulted in their release." Mametova noted that Kazakhstani authorities could deport Medzhit at any time.

¶8. (SBU) Mametova also said many refugees cannot qualify with the UNHCR as official refugees, because they escaped over the border without documents or came as tourists, but are afraid to go back. According to Mametova, the number of such undocumented refugees has increased since the July events, but UNHCR, or Mametova's own organization, can do little to help these refugees. The Chairwoman of Kazakhstan's "National Association of Uighurs" appealed to the United States to urge China to alter its policies in the XUAR and provide all possible assistance to refugees.

#### TIGHT BORDER CONTROL PREVENTS INCREASE IN NUMBER OF REFUGEES

¶9. (S) UNHCR's Senior Regional Legal Advisor, Narashima Rao, told PolOff in September and October that the UNHCR has not observed a marked increase in the number of asylum seekers since July (ref B). He attributed this situation to the vigilance of the Chinese and Kazakhstani Border Guards. Rao said the Kazakhstani Ministry of Emergency Services convened an August meeting with UNHCR, at which they communicated their allocation of financial and personnel resources to prepare for a large inflow of migrants. Rao asserted he had heard that the refugee surge never materialized, because Kazakhstan's Border Guard Service, which falls under the authority of Kazakhstan's Committee for National Security (KNS), increased its cooperation with Chinese authorities, and prevented most Chinese Uighurs from entering Kazakhstan. "Almost no new visas are being issued, and the borders are essentially closed to Chinese Uighurs," Rao declared. Nonetheless, Rao had not heard any report that authorities deported Chinese Uighurs with valid refugee status.

#### UNHCR OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON TREATMENT OF REFUGEES

¶10. (SBU) Rao asserted authorities detained Chinese Uighurs with UNHCR-approved refugee and asylum-seeker status on several occasions. According to Rao, they were released quickly after intervention by

UNHCR, which he attributed to UNHCR's intensive campaigns to educate refugees about their rights. Rao, who has run UNHCR programs to train police in the Almaty City and Oblast, said that "rank-and-file" police routinely demand documents from all residents of Kazakhstan and are reluctant to accept the validity of UNHCR certificates of refugee status. However, since the UNHCR has thoroughly trained senior Kazakhstani police officials, refugees usually are released quickly once better-trained and more senior officers become involved. Thus, Rao confirmed Mametova's statement that refugees often face threats of detention from local police, but asserted that UNHCR involvement resolves these generally minor incidents.

¶11. (S) Rao highlighted one significant September incident in Almaty, in which officers from the Almaty Department of the KNB allegedly took three refugees and two asylum seekers from their homes. The refugees were released within approximately three hours after the authorities detained them, after their relatives -- acting on UNHCR's advice -- called the local police. The UNHCR sent a note to the government of Kazakhstan to protest this treatment of refugees. Rao told PolOff "this incident was a clear message to Chinese Uighurs not to come here, and to the Uighur community in Kazakhstan not to stir up trouble." He also said at least two Uighur refugees had been attacked and badly injured, but that it is difficult to know if the refugees were unfortunate victims of random criminal violence, or if the attacks were politically-motivated. Nevertheless, Rao told PolOff "the timing of the attacks was suspicious."

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#### WORLD CONGRESS OF UIGHURS DEPUTY CHAIRMAN CRITICIZES CHINA

¶12. (SBU) PolOff also met in September with Kakharman Kozhamberdiyev, the Kazakhstani Deputy Chairman of the World Congress of Uighurs (WCU), and Abdrashid Turdiyev, the Chairman of the Union of Uighur Youth, to discuss the reaction of Kazakhstani Uighurs to the July events in the XUAR. Kozhamberdiyev asserted that China's violent suppression of a peaceful July 5 protest in XUAR united all Uighurs in disapproval of China's actions. Kozhamberdiyev accused the Chinese government of provoking violent conflict and portraying Uighurs as extremists and terrorists. The Deputy Chairman told PolOff Chinese Uighurs are seeking more autonomy in the XUAR, not independence, and are protesting against local authorities, not against the Chinese people. According to Kozhamberdiyev, the World Congress of Uighurs (WCU) supports an eventual dialogue with Chinese authorities, with certain preconditions, including a release of political prisoners and reforms to make the autonomous region a republic.

¶13. (SBU) Kozhamberdiyev, who requested to meet PolOff in a public park, spoke at great length about his views on Chinese "oppression" of Uighurs. He called Chinese policies and actions in the XUAR, such as forced sterilizations, and restrictions on Uighur-language education and practicing Islam, "acts of aggression." Kozhamberdiyev said China is particularly afraid of the Uighurs' dedication to Islam, which Kozhamberdiyev said is "one of the most essential aspects of Uighur identity," and also one of the last remaining obstacles to assimilation. Kozhamberdiyev described one incident in which Chinese authorities hosted a meal in a Uighur community during Ramadan. Kozhamberdiyev, who says he has relatives in China, told PolOff that due to mass relocations of Han Chinese, the Han population in the XUAR changed from 261,000 in 1949 to 8.4 million currently. He asserted discrimination against Uighurs in finding employment and prohibition of freedom of speech. Noting that the Washington D.C.-based WCU has held numerous meetings and press events in the United States, Kozhamberdiyev urged the United States to speak out on behalf of the plight of Chinese Uighurs.

#### UIGHUR ACTIVIST CONCERNED ABOUT VIOLENCE SPREADING TO KAZAKHSTAN

¶14. (SBU) Kozhamberdiyev has vociferously criticized the Chinese government in media statements. A post on a Kazakhstani opposition news-site quoted him as pointing to the right of Uighur people to self-determination as the main goal of the WCU and demanding that the Chinese authorities hold a referendum. In the online posting, Kozhamberdiyev also said that Chinese special services created the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) in order to discredit



the movements of "real patriots" and criticized the ETLO activists for being too provocative. In another article in August, Kozhamberdiyev asserted the WCU was working to prevent unrest in the XUAR from spreading to Kazakhstan. (COMMENT: Kozhamberdiyev, a mature and scholarly interlocutor, appears to be a complex -- and somewhat controversial -- figure. He openly criticizes the Chinese government's administration of the XUAR. However, he ardently advocates efforts to prevent the spread of unrest to Kazakhstan, as do more moderate figures, such as the Republican Cultural Center's Turgan Rozakhunov. END COMMENT.)

#### KAZAKHSTANI UIGHURS ALLEGE HARASSMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN

¶15. (S) According to Kozhamberdiyev, the Chinese government is so concerned about his activities that his relatives in China -- and even people who just happen to share last name -- are under constant surveillance. Kozhamberdiyev alleged that Kazakhstan, afraid of damaging its relations with China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, also limits his organization's activities. Kozhamberdiyev cited a recent case when the WCU paid to hold a discussion at the office of an Almaty press club, which was closed for repairs when WCU staff arrived. (COMMENT: Post's Political Assistant in Almaty spoke with Kozhamberdiyev separately about what appears to have been the same incident. END COMMENT.) According to Kozhamberdiyev, Yermek Narymbayev, a Kazakh-nationalist friend and

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head of the newly-founded Kazakh-Uighur Friendship and Solidarity Committee, suggested Kozhamberdiyev hold a photo exhibition and discussion at the Kalamger Press Club in Almaty. Abdrashid Turdiyev, the Chairman of the Union of Uighur Youth and a key figure in the fiery July rally in Almaty (ref A), collected photos for the exhibition. When Kozhamberdiyev approached the press club on the morning of the event, he observed police detaining Narymbetov and Turdiyev, who were released shortly afterward, after receiving warnings not to engage in "unsanctioned activities."

¶16. (S) Kozhamberdiyev asserted that the WCU faces various administrative troubles every time it opens an office in Kazakhstan. He complained that his computers have frequently become infected with malicious viruses that interfere with his work. He implied that the viruses may have been planted by Chinese Special Forces, possibly with the Kazakhstani KGB's assistance. According to Kozhamberdiyev, China primarily wants to prevent an open flow of information about life in the XUAR to Kazakhstani Uighurs and the international community. Abdrashid Turdiyev alleged Chinese national security services' responsibility for the burglary of his home several times. According to Kozhamberdiyev, however, Uighurs in the Kyrgyz Republic face a more difficult situation. Kozhamberdiyev said that he was invited to attend a conference, but Kyrgyz Border Guards refused to admit him, because of pressure from China.

#### KAZAKHSTANI UIGHURS CRITICIZE KAZAKHSTANI "PRO-CHINA" POLICY

¶17. (SBU) Kozhamberdiyev and Turdiyev also commented on the Uighur refugees' difficulties. They agreed with Mametova and Rao about Kazakhstan's reluctance to admit Chinese Uighurs, and the difficulty of obtaining UNHCR status (ref B). Kozhamberdiyev criticized the role of certain prominent Kazakhstani think-tank analysts, especially Konstantin Syroezhkin, chief researcher at the government-affiliated Kazakh Institute for Strategic Studies in Almaty, for encouraging a pro-China foreign policy. According to Kozhamberdiyev, Syroezhkin, with whom he had worked for half a year, previously lived in Beijing, is fond of Chinese culture, and has written many articles expressing support for China's perspective on various issues. Kozhamberdiyev suggested his work may be "funded by China."

¶18. (SBU) Syroezhkin's summer media statements on events in the XUAR have certainly correlated to the official positions of the People's Republic of China. In one instance, Syroezhkin and Kozhamberdiyev argued during an Almaty seminar in July whether the Uighurs had ever previously established their own country. During this forum, Syroezhkin stated that the People's Republic of China's law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, enacted in 1984, stipulates that ethnic groups can practice self-government in their regions and constitutes a legal guarantee for ethnic groups to exercise their right of

regional autonomy. The article, under the headline, "Kazakh expert rebuts Xinjiang separatist leader's claims," appeared in China's Xinhua General News Service, on July 15. A July 30 article in the pro-government newspaper "Argumenty i Fakty," quoted Syroezhkin that while the situation in Xinjiang spiraled out of control because of "tough and sometimes openly cruel actions by the authorities," the United States was also to blame for the riots. Syroezhkin said, "I am not hinting, I am speaking directly. Who participated in the World Congress of Uighurs that took place in May of this year? Four Senators and two U.S. Congressmen. Directors of almost every NGO that had been involved in organizing 'color revolutions' in the former Soviet Republics participated as well." Several days after Syroezhkin's comments, China's Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Cheng Guoping, expressed gratitude to Kazakhstan for its support in preserving the country's sovereignty. He also said "bilateral relations are experiencing the best period in the history of their development, meet people's interests in both states, and benefit the stability and development of the whole Central Asia."

¶19. (S) COMMENT: During his meeting with the Deputy Director of the Marshall Center, Kazakhstan's Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council, Marat Shaikhutdinov, asserted his government cooperates closely with the Chinese government (ref C). He

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specifically praised the close relationship between Kazakhstani and Chinese-government affiliated think-tanks. Shaikhutdinov's comments confirm Emboffs assessment that the anti-U.S., pro-China Syroezhkin, who works for a think-tank that falls under the Kazakhstani Presidential Administration, is one influential voice in the Kazakhstani government urging close cooperation, particularly on security issues, between China and Kazakhstan.

¶20. (SBU) Comments from Kazakhstani Uighurs indicate that ethnic identity has the potential to politically mobilize. This factor explains the Kazakhstani government's focus on maintaining the country's inter-ethnic harmony. While the government does not want Kazakhstan's close relationship with China disrupted by the unrest in Xinjiang, the authorities have apparently decided to provide a modicum of political space for Kazakhstani Uighurs to vent their concerns. Kazakhstani Uighurs are also struggling to find a balance between expressing shared discontent with China's response to July events in the XUAR without endangering their community's comparatively comfortable position in Kazakhstan. END COMMENT.

SPRATLEN